

# Managing Demand

*“Safeguarding the Peer Review Process”*

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# Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

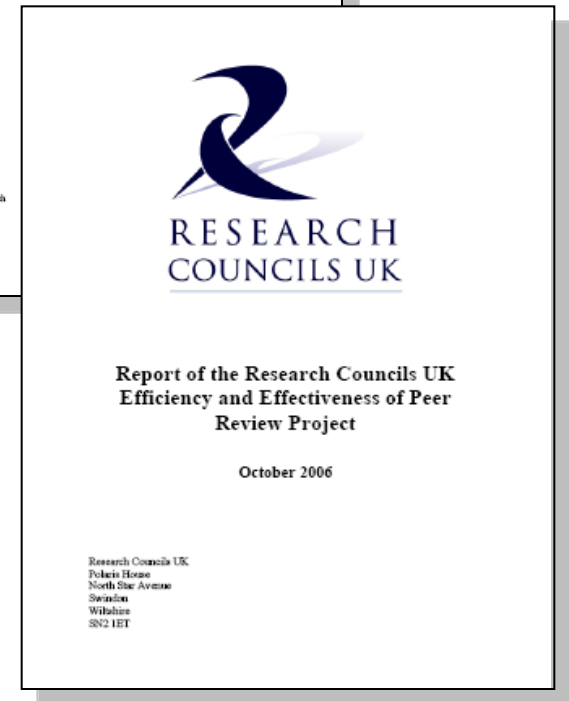
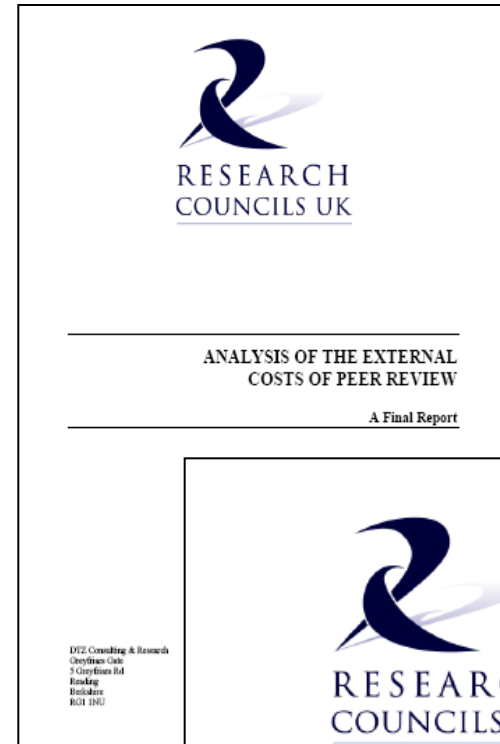
The main UK Government agency for funding research and training in Engineering and the Physical Sciences investing around £840 million (€1000m) a year



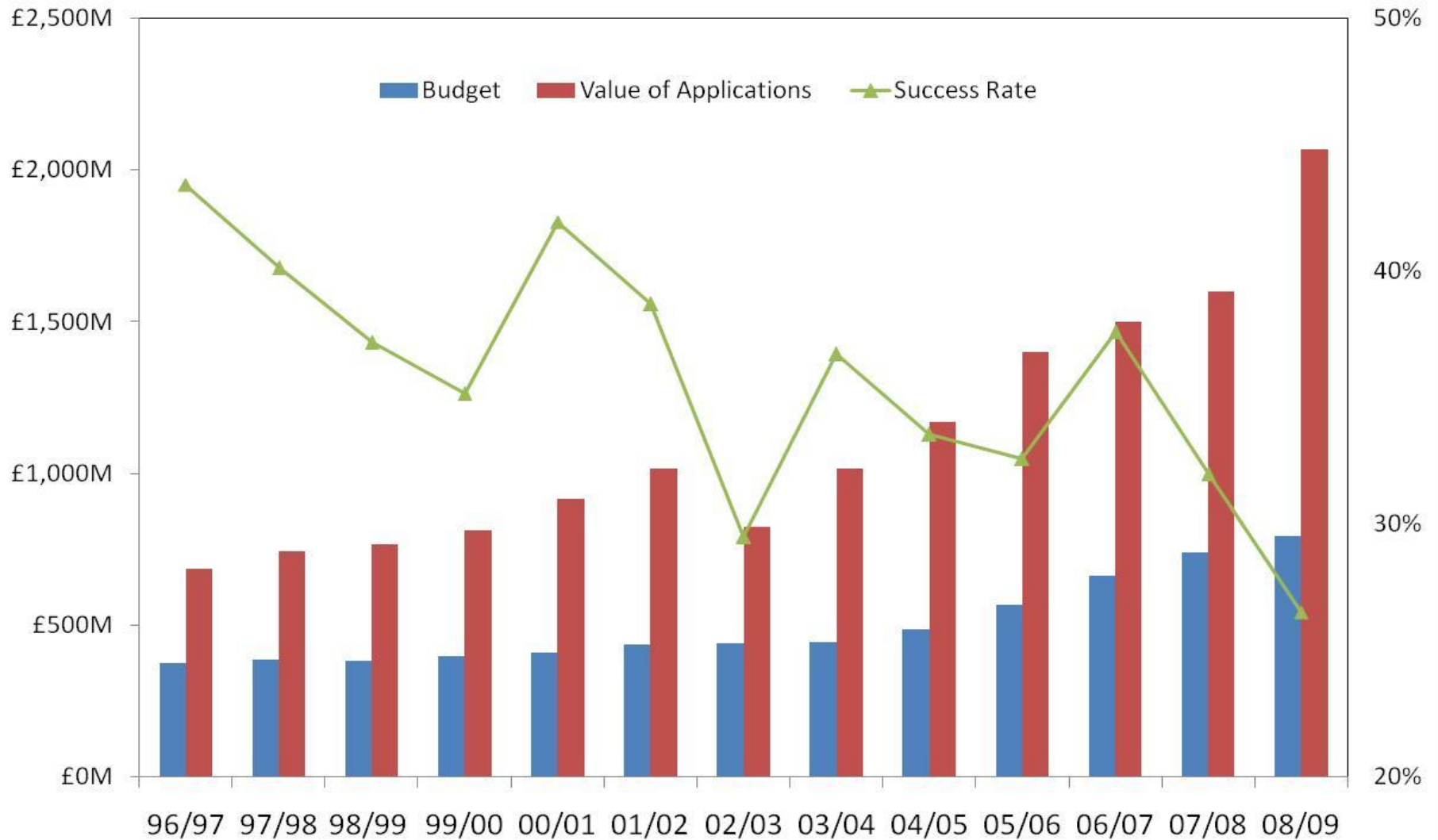
- ❑ Historically an “open-door” policy to all proposals....
- ❑ ....but strong feedback from the community on declining success rates
- ❑ Prudent to act now to underpin efficiency of the process
- ❑ ...and reduce burden of peer review on stakeholders



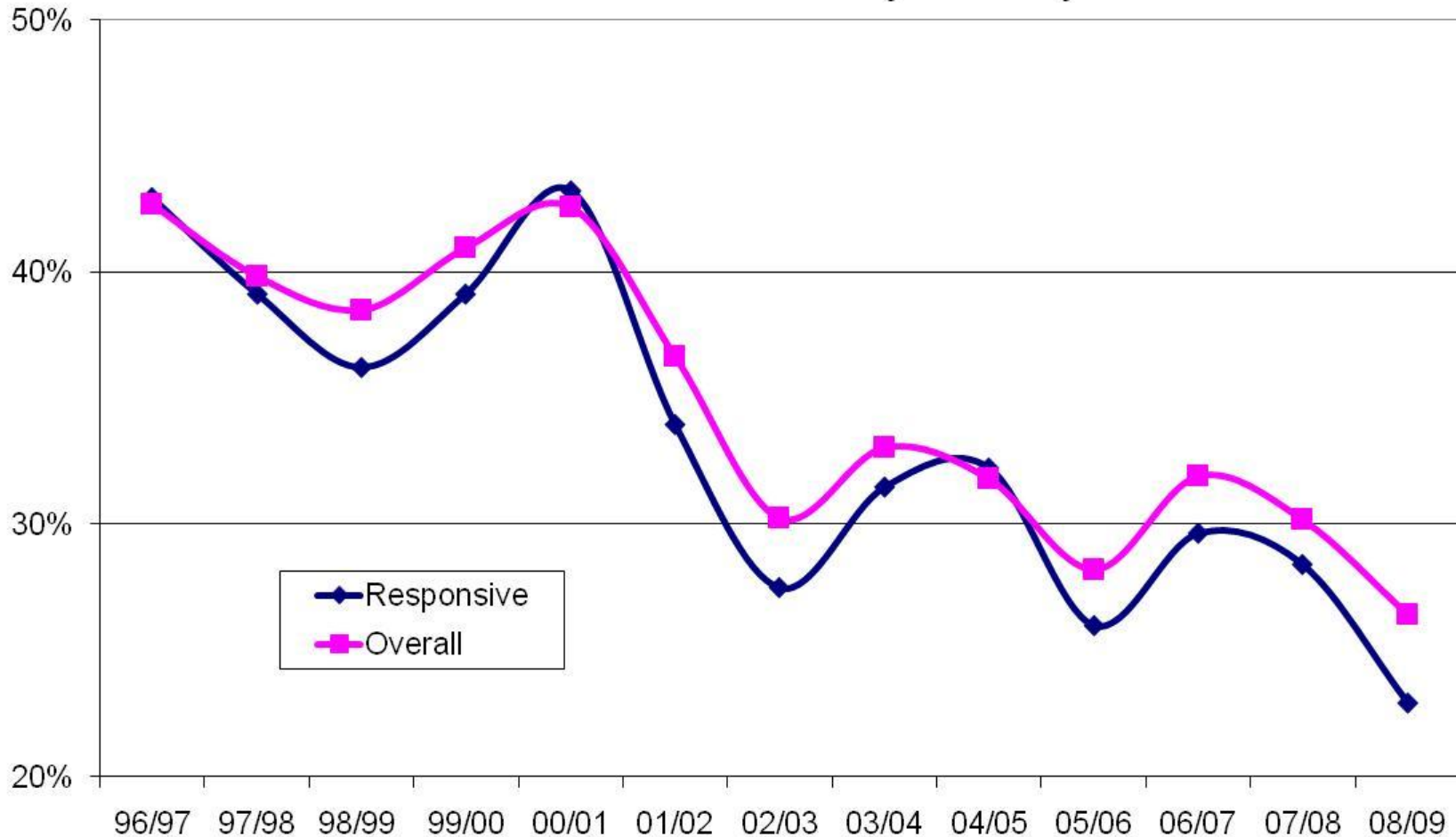
- ❑ 2006 RCUK Review into Effectiveness of Peer Review
- ❑ Number of proposals to Research Councils has doubled since 1988/89
- ❑ Review process becomes ineffective when success Rates <10%



Trend in grant values since 1996/7 compared to success rates



## Responsive Mode and Overall Funding Rates over the last 10 years by Number



**EPSRC**

Pioneering research  
and skills



# What are the aims of managing demand?

- ❑ The focus is to:

- § remove the lowest quality proposals from the peer review system
- § constrain repeatedly unsuccessful applicants

- ❑ Seeking a substantive reduction (approx 30%) in number of applications



# The Primary Benefits

- A reduced burden of effort spent on assessing poor quality applications by the peer review community
- More time and effort available to peer reviewers to spend on the consideration of high quality proposals
- Increased efficiency of the current peer review process by a reduction in submission of uncompetitive applications
- Better quality research through fewer, more considered proposals
- Increased scope to focus on communicating new opportunities rather than reactive communication about success rates





# What's Changed?

## **Resubmissions** (From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009)

- No longer accept resubmitted proposals

## **Repeatedly Unsuccessful Applicants** (From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010)

- Applicants who meet the criteria are limited to one application only (as PI or Co-I) during the 12-month “cooling off period”.



# Criteria – Repeatedly unsuccessful applicants

- Within any 2 year period any PI that :
  - Has at least 3 proposals ranked in the bottom half of a Rank Ordered List or that do not make panel
  - AND has a personal success rate of less than 25%
- Success rate will be calculated by number of proposals submitted not value
- Individuals who are one-away from satisfying criteria are notified



# Comment in the Community

- “Want some more depressing news? Consider [EPSRC's new policy](#).”
- “EPSRC have now changed the regulations so that researchers with a less than 25% rate on their applications get banned for applying for more funding for a year”
- “Almost everyone would be blacklisted, no? It's most certainly a "rich get richer" types scheme”
- “My only consolation is that it means that university departments will have to stop their relentless pressure on us to keep applying for lots of grants.....”
- “.....Fewer applications but higher quality will have to be the name of the game.”



*“a radical, unpopular but courageous effort to address a crisis in the peer-review system.”*

*“EPSRC is leading the way with a gutsy gamble: the very type of project it wants its researchers to pursue.”*

***TOUGH LOVE, Nature editorial, March 2010***

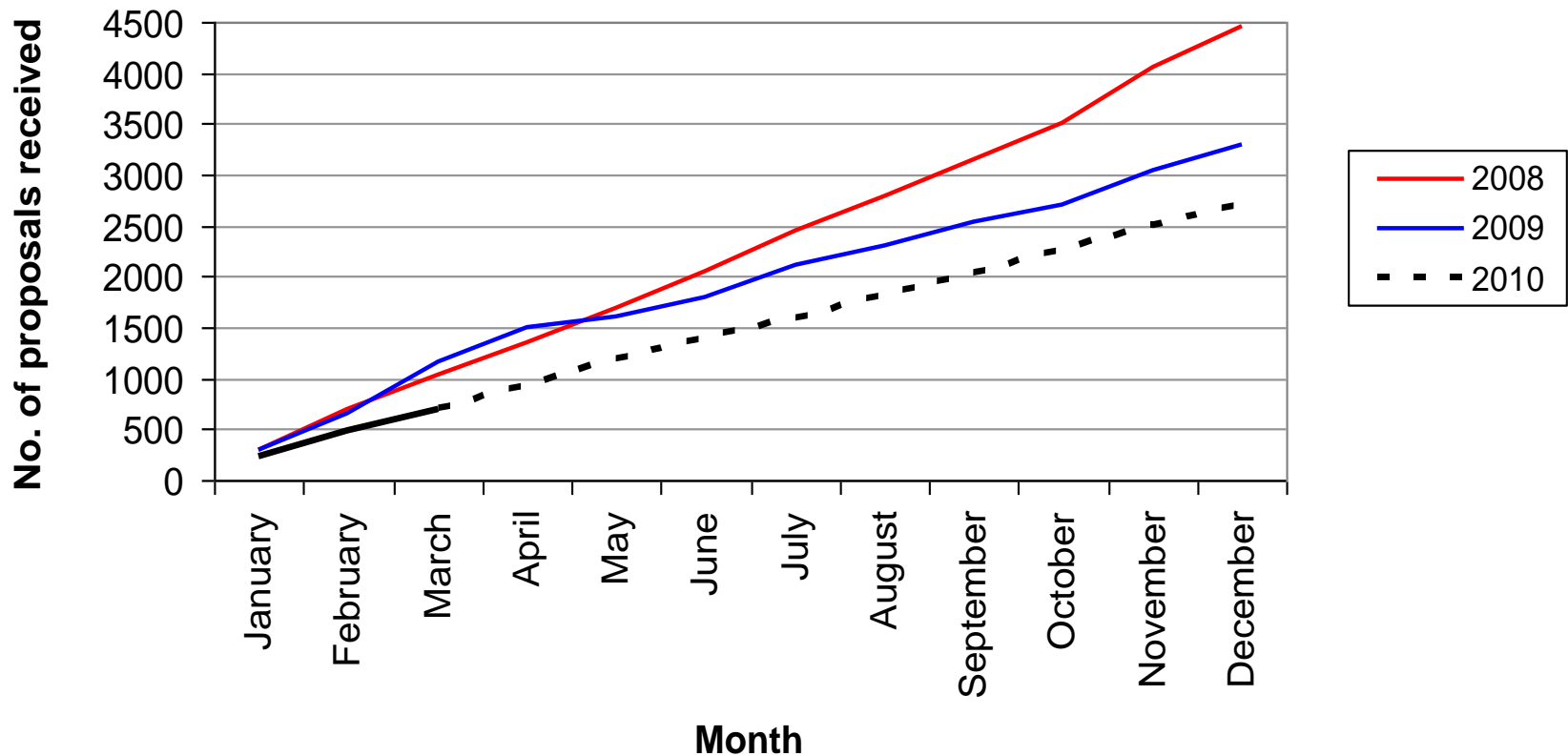


## Policy Impact so far.....

- ☐ Number of proposals are down by about 35 % from the same period the previous year.
- ☐ Success rate now back over 30%
- ☐ Feedback from peer review panels suggests quality has not degraded.
- ☐ Anecdotal evidence suggests institutions and applicants are thinking more carefully about proposal prior to submission.
- ☐ There have been no significant shifts in the number of investigator per proposal or the values being requested.



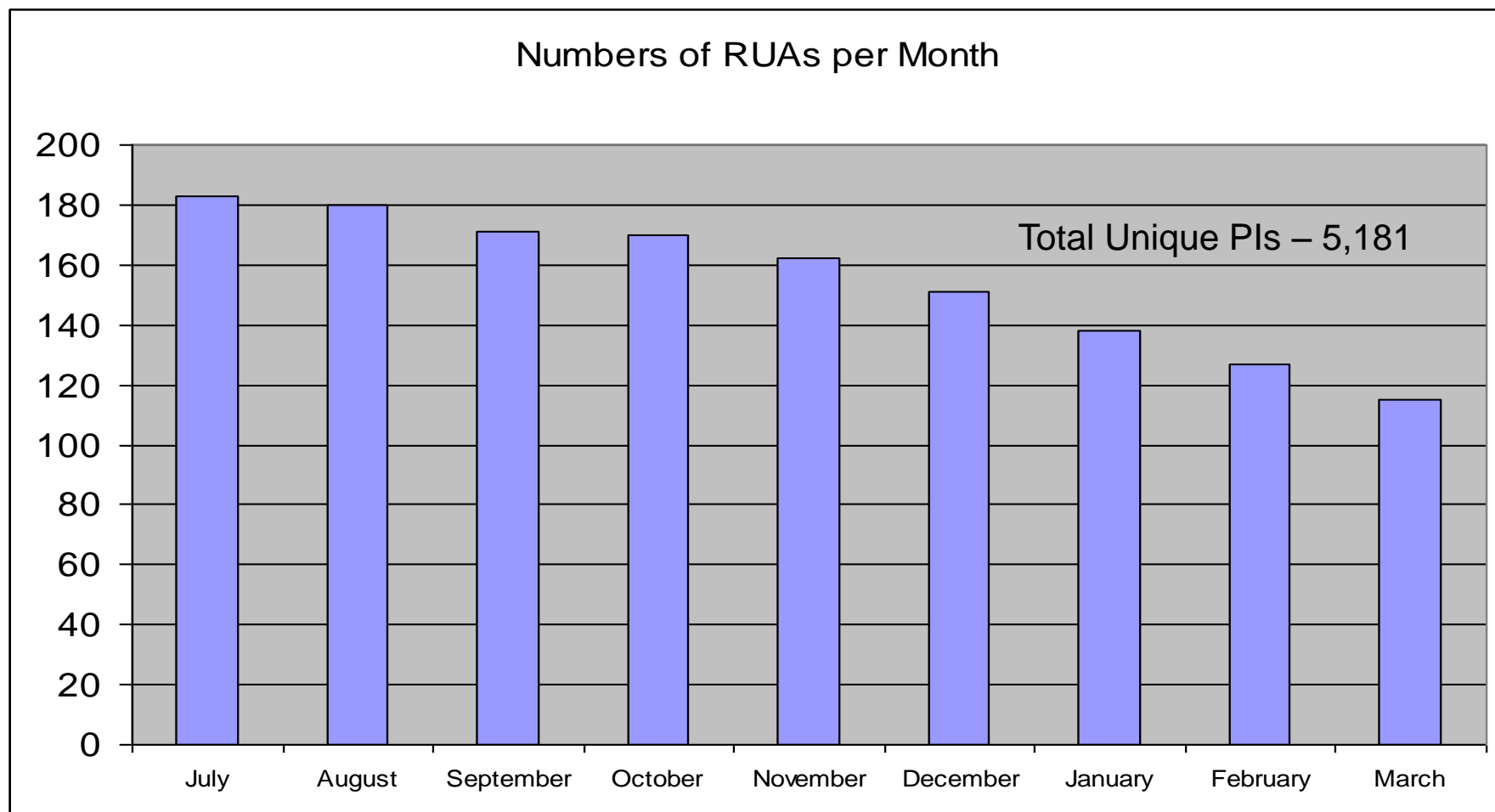
## Cumulative Investigator- led and Managed and estimated 2010



35% fall in the number of applications/30% fall in value



# How many have been affected?



# What's the impact by age of applicant?

	Age Profile of All Applicants to EPSRC	Age Profile of All Applicants who are successful	Age Profile of Repeatedly Unsuccessful Applicants
<35	16.0%	13.6%	9.6%
35-44	34.9%	35.2%	40.0%
45-54	29.1%	28.7%	34.8%
>54	15.4%	16.8%	14.8%
Unknown	4.6%	5.7%	0.9%





# Efficiency Savings – Safeguarding Peer Review

- ❑ Estimated 1,700 reduction in numbers of proposals in FY 2009/10 compared to FY 2008/09
- ❑ A a saving of £21M in time spent writing and reviewing unfunded applications
- ❑ Bulk of saving in time spent in writing proposals (74%); peer review assessment (21%) and RC administration (5%)

Note: Savings are not cashable (and need to be offset against the cost of developing the policies)



# In Summary

## **We have:**

- ☐ developed measures based on the advice we have received
- ☐ acted in response to community concerns and reduce some of the burden associated with the review process...
- ☐ Encouraged the community to submit only the highest quality proposals and to take ownership of their submissions as part of normal business.

